C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 002271

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STATE FOR NEA/ARP, LONDON FOR TSOU, PARIS FOR ZEYA

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TAGS: PGOV PINR KDEM KU FREEDOM AGENDA
SUBJECT: THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY IS MY FRIEND: SUPPORT FOR
AND OPPOSITION TO REFORM UNITES POLITICAL OPPOSITES

REF: A. KUWAIT 2150
     ¶B. KUWAIT 2148 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: CDA Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C/NF) Summary: An emerging consensus between
ideologically opposite political blocs on the need for
political reform in Kuwait has led to the formation of a
number of unprecedented alliances in advance of the June 29
parliamentary elections. Some Islamist groups, like the
Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM), the political arm of
the Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood, are supporting pro-reform
candidates from both liberal and pro-Iran Shi'a political
associations. Other groups whose political power is likely
to diminish if reforms are implemented are also cooperating
to back candidates sympathetic to maintaining the status quo.
 One example is the Shi'a umbrella National Society
Coalition's support for pro-Government Sunni candidates who
oppose electoral reform, which is seen as potentially
detrimental to Shi'a interests. While these emerging
alliances are an important new political dynamic, traditional
alliances still figure prominently in Kuwaiti politics.
Nonetheless, these new alliances highlight the fact that
Kuwait's political system is evolving, albeit slowly, from
one based predominantly on personal, familial, and tribal
connections to one based more on real political issues. End
summary.

Opposites Attract

¶2. (C/NF) One example of how support for reform has united
political and ideological opposites is that of Mohammed
Al-Boushehri, a Shi'a member of both the Kuwait Democratic
Forum (KDF) and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), two
of Kuwait's leading liberal political associations. (Note:
The Kuwaiti Government does not officially recognize
political parties. End note.) Al-Boushehri, who was active
in the pro-reform, youth-based "orange movement" (ref A) and
helped found the Dialogue Center, an unofficial NGO that
seeks to foster more open dialogue between Kuwait's different
political and religious groups, told Poloff that he and other
members of the Dialogue Center were backing Adnan Abdul
Samad, a candidate affiliated with the National Islamic
Alliance (NIA), a conservative, pro-Iran Shi'a political
association, in the upcoming elections. Asked why,
Al-Boushehri explained that although he disagreed with
Samad's ideological leanings, he would support him because he
was both pro-reform and strong enough to stand up to the
Government. According to Al-Boushehri, "the key issues in
this election are reform and corruption."

¶3. (C/NF) Another liberal Shi'a member of the Dialogue
Center, Mohammed Al-Shaykh, echoed these views in a separate
meeting with Poloff. "Political affiliation is not important

in these elections," Al-Shaykh said. "We support all
candidates who support reform." He noted, however, that his
group had made it very clear to Samad that they would
strongly oppose him if he pushed for the amendment of Article
2 of the Constitution to make Islamic Shari'a the sole source
of legislation in Kuwait.

¶4. (C/NF) Another example of a reform-based political
alliance is the Islamic Constitutional Movement's (ICM), the
political arm of the Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood, support for
candidates on opposite ends of Kuwait's political spectrum.
ICM MP Dr. Nasser Al-Sane, who is running for re-election,
spoke at the opening campaign rallies of both Ahmed Lari, an
NIA candidate, and incumbent MP Ali Al-Rashid, an independent
liberal formerly associated with the KDF. According to a
source at Lari's opening, Al-Sane said "his organization"
(ie. the ICM) would support Lari's candidacy in that
district. Again, the central issue uniting these candidates
is their support for political reform. The ICM is also
cooperating with its traditional ally, the Salafi Movement,
on which candidates to support to maximize Sunni Islamist
representation in Parliament.

¶5. (C/NF) While the liberal-Islamist alliance is key to the
success of the "orange movement," many of Kuwait's liberal
elite are wary of getting too close to Islamist groups.
Former MP and Head of Parliament's Foreign Relations
Committee Mohammed Jassem Al-Sager, women's activist and
candidate Dr. Rola Dashti, and Kuwait University Political
Scientist Dr. Nada Al-Mutawa expressed to NEA Assistant
Secretary Welch their skepticism that Islamist groups were

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serious about reform. They were convinced Islamist groups
aligned themselves with liberals and were using political
reform and corruption as a means of building support and

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securing more seats in Parliament where they would then
reveal their true colors.

Resistance to Change

¶6. (C/NF) Alliances are also emerging between groups that
fear losing their political power if reforms are implemented.
 Sayed Mohammed Baqer Al-Mohri, the leading Shi'a cleric in
Kuwait and the Secretary General of the Shi'a Clerics
Congregation (SCC), a conservative Shi'a political
association, told Poloff his organization would support Jamal
Al-Omar, a liberal, pro-Government Sunni MP who is running
for re-election in a district with a large Shi'a population,
in the upcoming elections. Al-Mohri explained that Al-Omar
treated both Shi'a and Sunni constituents equally and went
out of his way to help Shi'a air their grievances. Al-Mohri
added that the Shia's main concern was that Salafis would be
elected. "They are a major problem for us," he said.
Al-Mohri explained that although he supported women's
candidacy in principle, the SCC would not support Dr. Rola
Dashti, a Shi'a running in the same district as Al-Omar,
because she did not wear a veil.

¶7. (C/NF) Abdul Hussein Al-Sultan, the Secretary General of
the National Societies Coalition (NSC), an umbrella
organization grouping four separate Shi'a political
associations -- the Islamic National Consensus Movement, the
Justice and Peace Grouping, the Shi'a Clerics Congregation,
and the National Charter Grouping -- told Poloff the NSC's
priorities were (in order of importance): 1) increasing the
number of NSC MPs; 2) increasing the number of Shi'a MPs; and
3) increasing the number of moderate MPs. Echoing Al-Mohri,
Al-Sultan said the Shi'a were strongly opposed to Islamist
candidates, and were cooperating with other political blocs
to prevent them from being elected. The majority of the
candidates supported by the NSC also oppose electoral reform,
which they feel could reduce the number of Shi'a MPs.

A Slow Evolution

¶8. (C/NF) Although new coalitions have emerged around the
issue of reform, traditional political alliances still
dominate Kuwait's political system. The primary political
divide in Kuwait is between the well-educated, more
sophisticated urban areas of Kuwait City and the primarily
conservative, tribal "outlying" areas, like Jahra, Fahaheel,
and Ahmadi. In the outlying areas, which represent roughly
12 of the 25 electoral constituencies, tribal alliances
largely determine which candidates are elected. Tribal
candidates tend to be either pro-Government or Islamist,
though a number of independents have also been elected from
these areas. In urban areas, the divide between liberals,
Islamists, Shi'a, and pro-Government elements is more
pronounced. As noted above, though, Kuwaitis' political
affiliations can shift depending on the issue, and
ideologically opposite groups can unite on an ad hoc basis in
support of a shared political objective.

¶9. (C/NF) The result of these complex alliances is a nuanced
political system still largely dependent on personal
connections, whether through one's family, tribe, or
religious association. Many contacts point out, however,
that this is changing. The participation of women and the
emergence of a grassroots pro-reform movement is having a
profound impact on these elections and forcing candidates to
address issues like education, gender equality, corruption,
and political reform. If the new Parliament passes electoral
reform legislation, this trend will become increasingly
pronounced.

¶10. (SBU/NF) A brief overview of Kuwait's political
associations is available on our classified website.

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